

DIVINITY ENSCONCED IN PERVERSITY—A STUDY OF DAVID STOREY’S NOVEL *RADCLIFFE*

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ABSTRACT

There is a distinct tradition of the ‘divine idiot’ in several literatures, and, a great many contemporary novels, in spite of their individual differences, extend this tradition. The idiot motif is based on the assumption that madmen, lunatics and outcasts are somehow holy or blessed, or possess a knowledge that normal people do not have. They are seemingly ridiculous in action and outward appearance but can behave better at the intuitive level, better than the so-called wise people. Nearly all divine idiot figures are “oppositional” figures, figures opposing more by their “being” there than by any conscious or articulated stance, the prevailing life-style, pattern of behaviour, and moral- ethical scheme. They are oppositional by virtue of being altogether different from the accepted “image of man.” Not every idiot is idealised, but more often than not, their presence offers a satirical light on the un-idiotic figures around them. It is possible to see in the divine idiot the author’s discontent with the way things are, with the way people live. This disconnect can generate a divine idiot via several routes, primitivistic, as in *Of Mice and Men*, romantic-religious, as in Wordsworth and *The Idiot*, satirical, as in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse- Five*, spiritual-cum-ironical-cum-comic, as in R. K. Narayan’s *The Vendor of Sweets*, and literary, as in Angus Wilson’s “interpretation” of Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*. These routes can be roughly called literary and moral. Writers coming after Dostoevsky find it difficult to ignore the literary route opened by *The Idiot*. In the paper under consideration, an attempt has been made to trace Myshkinian traits in David Storey’s novel *Radcliffe*.

KEYWORDS: Divine Idiot, Professional Clown, Intuitive Wisdom, Puritanism, Class-Conflict

INTRODUCTION

David Storey’s *Radcliffe* uses the idiot figure to cover a wider, political and class situation in welfare England. Here, Leonard’s idiocy is used to exploit the potential for irony. However, his idiocy also becomes a terrifying indictment of that class antagonism in which all positive values are debased and mutilated just because Leonard’s working-class lover cannot see anything except in terms of class-battle. It is an index to the perversity of class-antagonism that Tolson chooses to abuse Leonard’s love for what he believes to be class-gains. The novel is tragic because it shows that in the contemporary, conflict-ridden world a divine idiot is not enough to bring reconciliations. Indeed, what could be more ironical than the fact that Leonard whose whole career has been characterized by passive suffering and endless love for Tolson, should be forced to murder Tolson? *Radcliffe* is extremely conscious in the inter-textual use of Dostoevsky and *The Idiot*, and postulates, the two Dostoevskian categories of the divine idiot and the professional clown.

Both in its design and in its moral and thematic concerns, David Storey’s *Radcliffe* (1963) is an extremely ambitious and complex work. It explores the class issues in twentieth-century England with catholicity, openness and compassion. The main action of the novel takes place between the 1930s and the 1950s, that is, the years of Leonard *Radcliffe*, the protagonist’s life. John *Radcliffe*, Leonard’s ascetic, puritanical father assumes the charge of ‘The Place’ around 1930 and makes the majestic building habitable and secure against the intrusions of the growing army of

working-class people outside. It is here that Leonard, around whom the story moves, is born. Out of a progressive impulse, John, Len's father, had wedded Stella, a working-class girl, although it becomes clear, the marriage has not been altogether satisfactory. A more disquieting aspect of the marriage is that Stella has effectively been cut off from her class. She no longer feels interested in her class, and is wholly assimilated by The Place. Len is thus a product of an inter-class alliance that has had idealism behind it but little else to support it. He is a divine idiot who struggles hard to eliminate the deep-rooted antipathy between the two classes, but he fails miserably, although differently than his father. In this novel even as Storey offers a bitter national allegory foregrounding class relations in twentieth-century England, he integrates the allegory with a re-interpretation of the divine idiot. The re-interpretation is significant because it offers fresh variations such as sexuality, class dimensions, and class psychology. These variations add to the depth and complexity of Leonard's character who is a seeker after wholeness and unification. But much irony also accompanies the characterization of Leonard Radcliffe throughout the novel.

Len's Radcliffe features bear testimony to his aristocratic origin, but he is fragile, delicate and fitful. As a child he showed a general reluctance to being alive and exhibited convulsive fits: 'Then, when Leonard was about a year old—as though it were the final exasperated residue of this struggle—he was afflicted by slight convulsions. Almost like fits of anger and frustration -- a deep flushing of his face and trembling of his limbs—they gradually became more violent, making him gasp breathlessly and provoking swollen rashes on his skin'(p.28). John, Len's father, looked upon the incident of the birth as an omen as it coincided with an accident in the underground tunnel which left The Place shaking. Right from the beginning, Storey keeps complexifying the Myshkinian strains in Len. An aristocrat like Myshkin, Len suffered from Myshkinian fits but these eventually subsided. A more interesting variation relates to Len's mental state. It is impossible to decide whether he is an idiot or not. He becomes quite a familiar figure on the estate and is always followed by a jeering band of children. Even when alone, he walks in a manner that attracts every passer-by attention. At the end of the novel when he is facing conviction for the murder of his working-class friend Tolson, Leonard emphasises his insanity, his egotism and his congealed obsessive sexuality, while the prosecution stresses his rationality and his intelligence, his strongly defined sense of independence and his highly articulate reasoning power. Myshkin also provokes contradictory responses in people. In any case, while there are moments when he behaves idiotically, at other times he is highly rational and lucid. Leonard, like Myshkin, acknowledges his idiocy, but he is far more self-conscious about it. Indeed, unlike Myshkin, Len also seems to elevate idiocy to a height from where all subtle things become clear. In Myshkin, 'idiocy' leads to self-abasement; in Len 'idiocy' per se is a prize virtue. Len understands because he is a fool. Myshkin understands in spite of being, and being treated as, a fool. It is not possible to be certain as to how much irony is directed at Len by Storey, but one way of interpreting Len's obsession with idiocy is to see it as a decayed version of Myshkin's idiocy, just as Len himself is a decayed version of Myshkin, the prince par excellence.

Irrespective of whether or not he is an idiot, Leonard is certainly a misfit in the class-ridden world. He is seen swinging like a pendulum between the upper middle class to which his father belongs and the working class to which his mother belongs. The Place, which has been referred to as a giant with amputated limbs, is a witness to the rise, decline and fall of the aristocratic Radcliffes. Their past and present, fortunes and failings are all neatly embodied in this mammoth, dilapidated structure. Leonard's existence is as precarious as the foundations of The Place are. The building is weakened by the tunnel built underneath it; any train movement leaves it shaking, and it virtually groans and cries whenever any train accident takes place in the tunnel. The situation of The Place, which stands for British aristocracy, is very appropriate. It is on top of a hill, and immediately below it is a church. The Place is thus supported by evangelical zeal and certain puritanical norms and influences. Down below, at the foot of the hill, lie the modern houses and anonymous herd of

chimneys both of which represent the industrialized ethos of modern Britain. These houses surround from the base the isolated Place at the top.

It is in this isolated, aloof Place that Len is born. His elders treat him as the representative and upholder of the traditional, aristocratic values and as an exceptional person, a latter-day Cromwell, the guilty puritan who would yet be capable of complete action. They do not wish to see the basic truth about Len: he is a weakling without energy. John, Len's father, failed to achieve unity and wholeness, but the son might fulfil his fantasy. John admits that "at the back of my mind there's always lurking this ambition for some sort of complete action. One that exists simultaneously in both worlds. Someone who acts politically and religiously in the same event" (p. 25). Cromwell could act; he was the one whose "guilt matched his ambitions." John has not been another Cromwell, nor has been Austen, Len's uncle. But, both believe, Leonard may be. Neither his father nor his uncle realize that like The Place, indeed like their class, Len has a very shaky hold on the future. They both burden him with their grand class fantasies, which are at best a product of their wishful thinking, their refusal to see the logic of history. Class obsession turns them into idiot of sorts. The consequences of their desire to turn Len into a latter-day Cromwell are as disabling to him as is the psychological hump that Sylvia in Angus Wilson's *Late Call* carries all her life, the hump that represents her legacy from childhood.

It is with Cromwellian fantasies that the elders in The Place watch the growth of Leonard. Len's early life has just nothing in it to sustain these fantasies; still Austen treats him as a 'Prince' who should not stoop down to the level of ordinary human beings. He takes an uncanny interest in Len because the "upper class is to keep distinction by birth and family alive." He hopes that Len's artistic temperament is truly aristocratic. He is encouraged in his aestheticism by his uncle and the result is a distorted, dissociated vision. Len forms his own exotic world which includes his peculiar house, his family, uncle Austen and the objects at his shop. His relation with the outside world is almost negligible. As a result, he feels greater affinity and sympathy with mute objects than with living beings. He tries to find in the colours of the carpet that significance which eludes him in the outside world. He lives more in a dream-world and realizes that the Place is only an extension of his own mind. This imaginary world is the real world for him: "The rhythmical colours and the devised structures, all unused, were the good things; outside everything was grey, and unused, and even painful" (p.31). Due to this strange desire of his elders to mould him according to their anachronistic dreams, Len becomes incapable of forming relationships with other children.

Len would have survived if he had stayed confined to the upper-class world, but then, again out of the same progressive impulse that once made him marry Stella, his father removes Len from the private school and admits him in a Council school. The new, rough environment Len finds in the school leaves him bewildered and lost. In a scene which is a clever pastiche of the opening scene of *Madame Bovary*, Storey depicts the entry of Leonard in the school where his class-mates, who come from the working class, are amused at "his plaintive isolation and permanent expression of condolence" (p.7). He is supported by the middle-class teacher who looks up to him as her ideal pupil. His class-mates consider him and accomplice of the teacher when he is able to answer all her questions. The teacher further aggravates his alienation from the rest of the class by humiliating a big boy Victor Tolson for not being able to give any answer. But she is stunned when Leonard, in an attempt to connect with Tolson, does not oblige her with answers: "Now, you're not going to let me down" p.10. The incident is symbolic: Len is, at last, breaking away from his own superior class as well as from the teacher's, by behaving like the working-class class-mates. He is, in effect, declaring through his "silence" that he would rather end up where Tolson is going to. As the novel proceeds, Len is actually found to be taking up jobs that are characteristically working-class.

Len craves for the support of other children and does not like being given special attention by the teacher. He can reject his middle-class teacher, who hates to associate with the working classes but slavishly adores the upper middle class. Still he is not acceptable to the classmates. They, of course, find the teacher despicable, but do not like Len's vulnerability and passivity either. Len is clever and helps them, but his passivity, his desire to offer himself as a victim, only infuriates them. In spite of his efforts to be one of them, Len remains something of an oddity amidst the working-class boys. He is incapable of meeting the working-class boys on equal terms; his superiority expresses itself through his docility and suffering. In many ways, Len retains this attitude right until the end. He has been reared by his elders for pitying, patronising the poor, or else, for quietly suffering their injustices and cruelties'. He has not learnt the way to be like them, to love them. He even wants to step down the class ladder and mingle with the working class. But the problem is that, although he really wants to become one with the working class, changing one's class is as difficult as changing one's skin. How does one shed one's class? What if one's class refuses to shed one? His sincere efforts are thwarted on account of the class burden he is born with. His attempts to be one of the working –class crowd only deepen his internal conflict and accentuate his isolation. Storey problematizes Myshkinian attempts to meet the poor in a space beyond class-consciousness. Behind such attempts, he suggests, is often present a reductive concept of the poor, which only enrages them. To the extent that such attempts are sanctioned by Christianity, Storey problematizes Christianity as much as Myshkin's "successful" transactions with the poor. In the novel, Len's father had married Stella out of a reductive sense of pity for the poor. Len also seems to be heading for a similar superior action. Here one is reminded of Colin in David Storey's novel *Saville*. Colin, a working-class scholarship boy gets out of the coal pit, takes a job in a school, only to find that he is a *déclassé*, alienated from all the classes, unable to relate himself with any class, even with an individual "Alienated from his class, and with nowhere to go." Len's experiences at the grammar school simply fragment his personality.

Len is very modest and self-absorbed, and lacks the will to act, a quality associated with the lower classes, even though it sometimes leads these classes into destructive acts. Len is sensitive, but the passivity he displays has nothing great about it. This is made clear in his first visit to the Council school: "it was the kind of bland transparency seen in people of little sophistication or self-assertion, and in certain peripheral conditions of idiocy" (p.7). Again, Storey invokes not only the malaise afflicting his class but also Myshkin's quietistic passivity in the face of any challenge. To Storey, Len's passivity, his avoidance of self-assertion, can be related with "certain peripheral conditions" but does not have anything divine about it. In this way, Storey is de-divinizing the divine idiot, is asking us to view it as the sign of devitalization in a class. Storey avoids privileging the brutal behaviour of Len's class-mates, but their rage he finds understandable. They are often crazy, but they at least do act. In various love-scenes between Len and Tolson, the latter goads Tolson to fight but he calmly submits before Tolson's muscular energy: "Superficially, he was physically docile and acquiescent; mentally he was quick and alert. He could never commit any of his feelings to action" (p.32). Of course, Len might think that his refusal to act, or rather his inability to will himself into action, is a mark of superiority, but the text finds this to be the reason behind the growing superfluity of the aristocratic class in modern times. Seen in terms of history, such passivity is nothing more than idiocy. It reminds us of Mr. Compositon's futile, though catchy, rhetoric about time being our misfortune or no battle ever being fought, let alone won. Len's self-absorption and passivity not only alienate him from his class -mates, they also cause a great deal of tension inside *The Place*. For these traits do not go well with the image of Len as a latter-day Cromwell which his uncle and father have fashioned out for him. Len's father is shocked: "No one could tolerate such abject humility" (p.45).

Leonard is caught in a conflict situation but has no effective resources at his disposal. Besides using passive suffering, he also uses another “divine-idiot” means, namely love. This does not work either, although its failure allows us to develop some sympathy for him. For what can a person do, short of committing suicide, if one is in a historical conflict not of his making? Indeed, Len seems to follow the “superior,” aristocratic advice of Prince Myshkin to the fellow aristocrats present at the Yepanchin soiree. There is something too extravagant, too euphoric about Myshkin's lecture and it is possible that Dostoevsky is ironizing his naivete. The lecture comes in the wake of Myshkin's disastrous fall which claims the disastrous vase for a casualty. In his naivete and confusion, Myshkin mistakes the tact and good manners of the aristocratic guests present in the party for their goodness of heart. He launches into a kind of ecstatic eulogy, praising the good deeds, real or imagined, of each one, and exhorting them to the fulfilment of their historic responsibilities. Myshkin is convinced that despite the shallowness and evil habits of the upper classes, they are of a healthy stock:

You think I'm afraid for them, that I'm their champion, a democrat, an advocate of Equality?... it's for you that I'm afraid, and for all of us taken together. I am myself a prince of ancient lineage and I'm in the company of princes. I am speaking so as to save you all, so that our estate should not disappear in vain, in obscurity..Why disappear and yield place to others, when we can remain in the lead and maintain our seniority. Let us be servants so as to be the captains.

Thus, Myshkin is offering to these worldly and corrupt people a vision of what they might be, a vision of themselves transformed by Christian love into servants of those they are “born” to rule. In the world Myshkin wants, the poor and oppressed will not rebel against the rich and powerful, because the rich will give up to the poor all that is needful freely and without coercion. Myshkin is, therefore, only peripherally concerned with the issue of class conflict. In contrast, *Radcliffe* is, first and foremost, a class novel, a national allegory along class lines, exposing how difficult the class issue remains even when someone from the upper class decides to lose everything—not for being senior but for equality and love.

It is difficult to be sure if at all Dostoevsky is ironizing Myshkin's vision of a superior destiny for the Russian aristocracy, though there is little doubt that he has few illusions about its capacity for self-sacrifice. However, Len, like his father before him, is seeking to operate Myshkin's vision, which belongs to a different period, in the present. The subtle interpretation of the divine idiot *Radcliffe* offers has multiple thrusts. It problematizes Prince Myshkin's class-thinking: after all, he is still thinking in terms of his own class, in terms of its true interests. If his thinking appears idiotic, it, at least in its operative part, is noble, divine. It is praxis. But at the same time, the novel is never blind to how different the class situation is in the twentieth century. Len, in following Myshkin's lecture, is being anachronistic, is blind to history itself. And yet a certain pathos attaches to Len all the same. For he does not even want a superior role for himself. Just equality and acceptance would satisfy him. He wants unity, wholeness, bridges—and gives Tolson, his militant working-class lover, all his love. That love should fail is sad indeed. It is because of his desire to surrender all his superiority, all his pride, for the sake of his love across the classes that turns Len the idiot into a divine idiot for our times. As we shall see, it is this tragic failure of Len's that becomes the cause of his legitimate thoughts on religion, history, and western society in the last scenes.

There is no doubt that Leonard ardently loves Tolson, who comes from an aggressive, animalistic, power-maniac working-class. Tolson represents what Leonard sadly lacks: energy. But this energy does not co-exist with the sharp

intelligence and sensibility which Radcliffe possesses. History is against their unity, although they are clearly meant to complement each other. It is not that Tolson does not love Leonard. But class is too much with him, and he is obsessed with settling class scores. David Pierce writes that working-class characters like Tolson are “clearly in opposition, anti-establishment, not defensively or apologetically, but defiantly and directly.” Destroying Len, the emblem of aristocracy, is his way of revenge on it. He takes it upon himself to establish the supremacy of the working classes over the decaying upper classes. And this supremacy he establishes by using his muscle-power and animal charm, to ‘conquer’ anybody who smacks of aristocracy.

Len values qualities such as love, trust, honesty and sincerity. Himself without energy, he nevertheless wants to channelize Tolson’s energy in the right direction. But in this, he fails. Tolson is not ready, perhaps not fit, to be directed by anyone who, no matter how much he loves him, belongs to the enemy class. The polarity and fanaticism his behaviour suggests is destructive but also self-destructive. Mary Eagleton writes that “these heroes (Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Lennie Hawk in *The Blinder*, Victor Tolson in *Radcliffe*) will go against their self-interest rather than compromise themselves and be won over.” Len is feeble, passive, solitary like *The Place*. Still, he is there, at least for the time being, just as *The Place* is there, in spite of being besieged from all sides by the estate houses. In a scene symbolic of class conflict, Len tries hard to force open the metal gates of *The Place*. The gates, however, are secured immovably. The point is that while he can try to damage them, to break them down, they too can resist them. The pity of the situation is that there is no longer any need for him to waste his energies fighting the gates, for Len is in *The Place*, always eager to take him in. The pattern in the novel has Len moving beyond his ‘superior,’ historically idiotic, blindness, towards a true divine idiocy. In contrast, Tolson stagnates in his hatred and violence, and thus proves to be incapable of moving beyond his kind of historically given idiocy, the kind of which loses its legitimacy beyond a certain point.

Len calls Tolson a misunderstood giant, a person who cannot understand his predicament. He is morally blind but his moral blindness is his predicament. He is incomplete; he is merely a brute, but then it is not in his power to realize that he can be whole. The evolution of consciousness in Tolson has not taken him beyond class-consciousness and hence he cannot be held responsible for his actions. Len is right in making this observation. But he himself seems to be an equally misunderstood person. His actions are wrongly interpreted. Changing class, especially migrating downward, is treated as idiocy even by those into whose class one wants to move. Len is considered an idiot by those below him. Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* describes this tendency to wash one’s hands of the class to which one belongs as “negative identification.” Len cannot leave Tolson at any cost. As a result the only alternative is that he will be crushed by his friend or will crush him in the course of time.

Radcliffe dies unfulfilled, but dies somewhat wiser. His death in a lunatic asylum seems to be a pathetic end, but in fact is not without some saving grace. For one thing, his unfulfilled life and wretched death are both part of history’s march. For another, for all its wretched interludes, his love for Tolson leads, among other things, to the latter’s rape of Len’s sister, who later gives birth to a child with features of both the classes. The issue is rather macabre—involving all kinds of violence and perversities. But, still, treated in terms of its final product, the death of Tolson has led to something which suggests some progress. In order to fulfil its dialectical nature, history requires many scapegoats and victims. A new era in socio-political structure comes only after a long drawn-out charade of nightmarish violence and conflict.

Tolson dies as well as lives without appreciating the importance of the traits which Radcliffe embodies and he himself lacks. Radcliffe alone is sensitive enough to reflect on the meaning of both Tolson’s mad violence and viciousness and his own passivity and despair. Len suffers but to him suffering brings some definite enlightenment. In an emotionally charged scene, he confronts his aristocratic relations and reproaches them for indulging in meaningless, intellectual games.

In a daring revolt against his puritanical legacy, he asks the Provost to explain as to why Christ simply failed to have any physical desires in his “human” career. If he suffered like any human being, how was it that he never felt the need to make love to another person?

If He could bleed and sweat and be exhausted why couldn't He feel equally the natural desire for a woman, or for another man? What is it that a man wants from such love that Christ himself had no need of? How on earth can we accept Him as an example when he was only half a man himself? (p.266)

This long indictment of Christ throws light on eternal discontent and unfulfilment created by Christianity, particularly Puritanism, which juxtaposes the body with damnation. Towards the end, as enlightenment seems to dawn on Radcliffe in the court, he increasingly discounts a merely sexual interpretation of his love for Tolson. According to him, he wanted to replace the life-denying absolutes of Puritanism with the only human absolute that is a mutually fulfilling love. Len killed Tolson not because he wanted to avenge his sister's rape, but because of the split which tormented both of them, the “split in the whole of Western society” (p.345). Leonard dies with infinite pity and love for the man who, out of his class prejudices, refused to be saved, refused to realize that wholeness was both possible and necessary. Their love was to be a paradigm of ideal, absolute love, but it did not materialize. The separateness that has afflicted the two classes for centuries, the solitude and unhealthy apartness that has left them to poison each other's existence, shows no sign of letting up, because history and its burdens are against their coming together in harmony and love. It is in these sections, with his constant emphasis on love, compassion and forgiveness that Len becomes a divine idiot. Len, here, makes a most considered use of Dostoevskian terms and asserts that in the present circumstances there “can be only two sorts of people: the divine idiot and the professional clown” (p.299). The clown motif has been used in relation to a great many characters (pp.38, 42, 72) and Len is repeatedly referred to as a fool and idiot (pp. 7, 46, 52, 187, 204, 216, 299). The frequent use of these terms is part of the interface Storey builds between Dostoevsky on the one hand and the class situation, on the other. Throughout the novel, the distinction that operates between the clown and the idiot is essentially the distinction between something negative and violent and something positive and holy. Blakeley is the most extreme case of a clown. He destroys his life just to save his idol, the upper-class ‘prince’.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be said that the clowns, anachronistic or otherwise, have lost all sense of the present. They are either still trying to perpetuate a past that is as certainly dead as the era of the Radcliffe's glory, or are still incapable of looking forward to a point when class hatred should give way to class harmony. It also seems possible to argue that even this divine idiot, Len, has little sense of the time in which he is placed. Yet he is forward-looking, a visionary. He looks forward to a time when class hatred will give way to mutual love and understanding.

REFERENCES

1. David Storey, *Radcliffe* (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.299. All subsequent references to this novel are to this edition and are enclosed within parentheses.
2. Angus Wilson, *Late Call* (1974; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.12.
3. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.345.

4. Cf. Flaubert's anonymous witness: "We were at a preparation, when the headmaster came in, followed by a new boy dressed in 'civvies' and a school servant carrying a big desk. Those who were asleep woke up, and everyone got to his feet with an air of being interrupted at work." *Madame Bovary*, trans. Alan Russel (1950; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p.15. Also cf. Martin Turnell: "The arrival of Charles Bovary as a new boy at school, the uproar caused by his hat and his accent, the furious master dealing out 'pensums' are related by an anonymous eyewitness who makes a solitary appearance and then vanishes for good....The image of the hat is therefore a compelling statement of the major theme. It is primarily a dunce's cap – this explains the spontaneous roar of laughter when Charles arrives at school – and a symbol of the society to which the wearer belongs." "Madame Bovary," in Raymond Giraud, ed. *Flaubert: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 99-100.
5. Cf. Raymond Williams: "This fundamental class system, with the force of the rising middle class behind it, requires a 'lower' class if it is to retain any social meaning." *The Long Revolution*, p. 348.
6. David Storey, *Saville* (1976; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.482.
7. The passivity that Prince Myshkin displays in *The Idiot* has grandeur in it. There is certainly some quality in Myshkin which arouses cruelty and aggression in others. The scene in which Myshkin is slapped by Ganya shows clearly how Myshkin deals with such aggression. Even stranger than the slap itself is Myshkin's response to it. Myshkin looks reproachfully at Ganya, then "suddenly unable to bear it any longer, he turned away from Ganya, his face towards the wall, and said in broken accents: 'Oh, how ashamed of yourself you will be!'" Surprisingly, what is missing here is anger, the urge to retaliate. Ganya does not feel ashamed of himself afterwards. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, trans. Julius Katzer (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1971), 2 bks, bk 1, p. 153.
8. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929; rpt. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), p.58.
9. Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, bk. 2, p. 268.
10. Mary Eagleton and David Pierce, *Attitudes to Class in the English Novel: From Walter Scott to David Storey* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), p. 133.
11. Tolson reminds one of Jimmy in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Like Tolson he also belongs to the working class and wants to destroy everything that smacks of the aristocracy. He even ill-treats his wife simply because she belongs to the upper class. But at the end of the play Jimmy and Allison reconcile and perhaps realize that they need each other, whereas Tolson dies without any such understanding.
12. Eagleton and Pierce 133.
13. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1790-1950* (1958; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.178.